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ABSTRACT

English is the second-largest major at the University of Puget Sound (Tacoma, Washington). Students may choose one of three emphases within their major: literature, creative writing, or professional writing. Puget Sound's professional writing program has grown gradually and slowly over the last 11-year period to include an array of 10 professional writing courses. In 1972, the department instituted freshman writing seminars designed to help students hone their writing skills. In response to student requests, two additional courses (Advanced Composition, and Writing and Rhetoric) were added to the curriculum. In 1976, Rosemary Van Arsdel, who studies Victorian periodicals, began to develop a series of courses devoted to studying the discipline of writing. In 1993, 30 of 60-some English majors have declared a professional writing emphasis. Many of these students have participated in a wide variety of internships which involved writing for publication. Because of considerable tension between the aims of a professional writing curriculum and the goals of a traditional liberal arts curriculum, faculty have worked hard to develop a coherent program that will incorporate a social constructionist understanding of writing within the curricular design. Three strategies can enable teachers of literature to see how workplace writing is an advantage in an English curriculum: (1) applying social constructionist theory to writing instruction illuminates relationships among audience analysis, textual analysis, and critical thinking; (2) renaming the program "Writing, Rhetoric, and Culture Track" allows literary critics and New Historicists to see the cultural context as a valid point of inquiry; and (3) the major now ends with coursework in rhetorical theory, thus assuaging the worries of colleagues who belittle simple "practitioners." (Three student journal entries are included.) (SAM)

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ED 360 637

Composing a Professional Writing Program at the University of Puget Sound

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CCCC Presentation
April 2, 1993

(Mary's Part:)

University of Puget Sound is a small, liberal arts institution located in the Pacific Northwest, in Tacoma, Washington. Our school has an enrollment of 2700 students, and, as with many liberal arts institutions today, it dedicates itself to excellence in teaching and is strongly student-centered. English is the second largest major at Puget Sound. The school offers small classes, individual student attention, and careful advising.

The English department at Puget Sound operates within this context by offering its students the choice of three emphases within their major. An English major may elect to specialize in literature, creative writing, or *professional writing*. This presentation will focus on the ongoing development and design of our professional writing emphasis, paying particular attention to the internship component of that emphasis. I'll begin by detailing the history of our professional writing emphasis, and my colleague, Sarah Sloane, will follow by describing our vision of how a professional writing program negotiates its uneasy position within a traditional liberal arts curriculum. I have drawn this description of the beginning of Puget Sound's professional writing program from my own personal experiences teaching in the program over the last eleven years, from

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interviews with Professor Rosemary Van Arsdel, founder of the program, and from several of her published articles.

Puget Sound's professional writing program grew gradually and slowly. In 1972, our department instituted freshmen writing seminars, courses which laid a foundation for student's work in honing their writing skills. These courses proved successful and popular, and, in response to student requests, two advanced writing courses were added to the curriculum: "Advanced Composition," and "Writing and Rhetoric." One writing course seemed to create a demand for another. Every course was filled to capacity, with long waiting lists. We tried to build in a progression in the course material that would increase the student's sophistication in language use and challenge in level of difficulty. We also offered courses in creative writing to our writing majors, including courses in poetry, drama, and short fiction.

Then, Rosemary Van Arsdel, a scholar who specializes in studies of Victorian periodicals, had the foresight in 1976 to develop first a course, and then a series of courses, devoted to studying the discipline of writing. Because of our department's small size at that time, we decided we could not offer some programs such as technical and scientific writing, nor could we offer extensive remedial courses. Students who need remediation were tutored one-on-one in our Center for Writing and Learning, an arrangement that still exists today. As the program developed, a final, senior-level "capstone" course was designed, a popular class called The Writing Institute. When first launched in 1976, Van Arsdel's course in professional writing was designed to show how writing well created interesting job opportunities for the English major, and to serve the English major who was not going into teaching or to graduate school. The course focused on the practical applications for good

writing skills and on revealing and developing a variety of career opportunities for people who have those skills.

I joined Rosemary Van Arsdel's efforts in designing a professional writing curriculum in 1983, one year after the first professional writing course (which had begun as a four-week winterim offering and grew to a one-semester duration) had expanded to two semesters. The syllabus looked challenging. Students spent the first six weeks in intensive language study and basics. They prepared a professional resume. They prepared a professional style analysis, and they interviewed for an internship. They conducted mock interviews and videotaped reverse roll playing in practice interviews. They explored tools of the professional writer: the dictionaries and the style manuals. They pursued a unit on journalism and a project on professional writing, laboring over copy editing and proof reading. We often invited guest lecturers from outside the academic world, from the real world of writing. When the semester was half over, the class divided into teams and students formed their own imaginary businesses or corporations. The work for the rest of the semester was tied to these groups, which prepared business letters, memos, a company report, a brochure, a major news release and public service announcements; the final project for the semester was a major investigative report.

Rosemary Van Arsdel began this course with the premise that professional writing would complement the writing of literary theses, as well as the traditional skills of close textual analysis, critical interpretation, and the techniques of formal research and scholarship. She did not suggest that English department abandon the then traditional discipline or become a professional writing school. She did suggest that a fusion of language and

literature take place to open up the numerous job options to the English major.

Her vision changed the English major in our department. In its earliest design, the Writing Institute offered an intensive review of the principles of language for the first third of the semester. The second third dealt with techniques of editing, proofreading and the revision of manuscripts. The third section consisted of a writing internship.

Before the development of the writing program at UPS, our department graduated between 8 and 12 English majors each year. In recent years, coincident with the development of the professional writing emphasis, the number of English majors has risen from 39 in 1983 to over seventy each year. More recently, this year, thirty of our sixty-some English majors have declared a professional writing emphasis.

Last year, students participated in a wide variety of writing internships. For example, four students wrote a video script for a restaurant promo, many students saw brochures through press or their own desktop publishing, and others edited weekly newsletters, or wrote speeches for executives in local businesses. Some discover the art of successful grant writing. Others write press releases for the arts, prepare environmental impact reports. Some students have been hired from their internships into a paid position. Others have networked into a "real" job laterally through contacts they have made during their internship studies. One of my students wrote the cash machine instructions for a large bank. Another wrote the training manual for new police hires. Still another wrote disaster reports from the field for the emergency management agency.

The University was most helpful in establishing the internship component of the senior class. Students could select internships on register

with our academic and career counseling service, or they could invent their own opportunities. Over the years, students have ranged into many areas where good writers are valued: government positions, publishing houses, public relations firms, advertising agencies, magazines, research agencies, software companies, banks, corporations, radio, television, financial houses, newsletters, newspapers, editorial functions, and public information networks. We work well with local and regional internship providers to assure that both the intern and the host receive the best experience.

My colleague Sarah Sloane tell you how this program has evolved from this model of twenty years ago into our professional writing emphasis of ten courses today. We have revised the program each year, enhanced and introduced courses, added coursework in computers and writing. Currently, we are working towards incorporating more rhetorical theory into our discussions of document design, collaborative writing, and writing in non-academic settings. The importance of the writing internship within the professional writing component has increased over the last twenty years, and Sarah Sloane is going to talk about how our particular internship program fits into a larger view of how professional writing might successfully integrate into a liberal arts curriculum.

(Sarah's Part:)

I joined the University of Puget Sound faculty a year and a half ago with the understanding that I would develop the English major's professional writing emphasis—as one of my colleagues put it, I should design a program that would lead our writing majors into the twenty-first century. Daunting as that sounds, I'm currently undertaking a more *modest* goal, and, together with Mary Turnbull, I am hoping to lead our professional

writing program into the next *year*. I want to talk here mainly about my vision for our professional writing program, a vision itself contextually informed by working within a very traditional liberal arts curriculum complete with core requirements and some advocates of a Great Books curriculum. Within this context, I am working towards informing our professional writing emphasis with current research in rhetoric and composition, especially research that sees writing as a contextual act and that sees writing as shifting according to discourse community, audience, and purpose of the document.

It wasn't until I arrived at my new job that I realized that despite the good efforts of Rosemary Van Arsdel and Mary Turnbull—and despite the fact that a solid foundation underlies a strong program almost twenty years old, that there was some considerable tension between the aims of a professional writing curriculum, or what has been characterized as a "pre-professional" program, and the goals and aims of our traditional liberal arts curriculum. I was made aware of this tension through discussions with colleagues both inside and outside my department as well as by the remarks of a recent outside reviewer from MLA-FIPSE, and I soon learned that the task that lay before me at Puget Sound entailed not only building the best possible writing major, but also negotiating gingerly the competing agendas of the program, the department, and the university.

While negotiating these competing agendas, I have worked hard to develop a coherent program that will incorporate a social constructionist understanding of writing within our curricular design. I have reorganized our curriculum to reflect work by Chris Anson and Lee Forsberg, Lee Odell and Dixie Goswami, and David Bartholomae. Our goal is to develop an emphasis in the department of English that will fulfill students' need for

writing experiences in a range of tasks and for a variety of purposes both inside and outside the academy, as well as to negotiate the rocks and shoals of a larger campus context that values Great Books and universal truths. It's been an interesting couple of years.

We are moving towards a new design of the professional writing emphasis that will help students become competent researcher-practitioners in a variety of writing contexts. Our working title for this emphasis is "writing, rhetoric, and culture," and our program will soon ask students to elect five courses (in addition to approximately five courses in literature), each of which focuses on a particular kind of writing: journalistic writing, writing for the workplace, writing for the sciences, or public relations writing, for example. In each class, students will be asked to analyze audience needs, document design, what counts as facts, proofs, evidence, or persuasive device, as well as textual features of successful documents in each discourse community.

One of these five classes is the writing internship Mary began to describe to you above, an internship shaped and guided by our capable staff in Academic and Career Advising, especially Ron Albertson. The internship program is a cornerstone of our efforts to connect the program with current scholarship which views writing as a contextual act. By participating in a writing internship at a wide variety of public agencies, non-profit organizations, and small presses, students from University of Puget Sound are realizing a real opportunity to work in the local community. Since its founding twenty years ago, University of Puget Sound's professional writing program has built links with local companies such as Boeing and Microsoft and encouraged students to work as interns in public relations, corporate communications, and journalism at these two companies and others.

More recently, however, students have begun interning at a variety of local community organizations, and I have set up a board of advisors among local business, technical, and community groups to guide these new internships and to develop more useful links between local and university communities, between liberal arts education and community activism, between professional writing and participation as a citizen in a democracy. Students work for the March of Dimes, Centro Latino, and Planned Parenthood, for example. Our students write successful grant applications, public relations materials, and fundraising appeals—materials that make a tangible difference to the quality of life of Tacoma citizens.

The internships our students undertake are not only an important part of their learning how to invent the university (Bartholomae)—and the world—but they also are the location of some of the greatest tensions between a liberal arts experience and professional writing. My school is sometimes suspicious of professional writing and these internships for some of the same reasons Margaret Mansfield outlines in her recent and helpful article, "Real World Writing and the English Curriculum" (*CCC*, 1993). Some colleagues see the internship as too practical, too real world, as an example of transactional writing that not only steals time from other writing activities, as Mansfield notes, but that steals time from close readings of Chaucer or a rejuvenating scan of Horace.

Let me give you an illustration of one of our writing intern's recent experiences, and then show you how that experience can be understood as central to liberal arts learning. I have reviewed internship journals, conducted interviews, and analyzed drafts and documents of sixty writing interns over the last two years, and I offer the following journal entries of a student I'm calling Amy Smith as a representative sample.

Amy was a sportswriting/broadcasting intern at KSTW-TV. She first writes in her journal:

> I went to the Utah/Sonics game tonight. The Sonics lost—SURPRISE! Anyway, I logged the game from the floor underneath the basket. Scott (our photographer) showed me how to do the edit codes. After the game we interviewed Kemp, Pierce, Benjamin, and Coach Karl. We went to Seattle to shoot the footage home and then I came back to Tacoma to clean up. When we go to games I am so exhausted. I feel like we never stop moving! But it's a great experience—I am very happy with this internship.

Later that semester, Amy writes:

> I am frustrated. I haven't been to a game in I don't know how long! While I've really jumped into the editing, I feel like I'm not doing anything. I'm really disappointed that my writing is shaping so slowly and worry sometimes that I will never be good at it. But Rod's pretty supportive at least. I hope this changes soon!

At the end of the semester, Amy writes:

> Rod [the sports director and lead anchor] left me alone tonight to hold down the fort while he shot live from the Mariners. I was the only sports person in the entire building! Everyone was coming to me if something needed to be done. Scary! I watched both the M's game and the NCAA Champs, edited, wrote some stuff, and did all the paperwork with a little help from Jan. Wow! What a day!

I believe that Amy's experiences here are directly tied to the goals of a traditional liberal arts curriculum, goals that might include being a literate citizen in today's democracy, understanding how the *truth* may shift according to who's telling (or broadcasting) the story, and, yes, the goal of being experienced in audience analysis, document design, and writing well.

It's strange that a program that has been around nearly twenty years would still need to fight for its existence. However, as a rhetorician, I can see

that the ways our professional writing emphasis has been contextually defined over the years has framed false dichotomies between reading and writing, between theory and practice, between school and workplace, between academic community and city community, between liberal arts and "the real world."

As a rhetorician, however, I can take apart the ways these dichotomies have been framed; I can recommend three strategies to help our colleagues in literature see how this kind of workplace writing is central to our curriculum. First, I use a strategy of explaining social constructionist theory, showing how experiences like Amy's involve audience analysis, textual analysis, and critical thinking. Second, I have renamed our program a "Writing, Rhetoric, and Culture Track," because literary critics such as New Historicists have an easier time seeing cultural context as a valid point of inquiry than they sometimes do workplace writing. Third, our emphasis now ends with coursework in rhetorical theory, assuaging the worries of colleagues who see us as "just" practitioners. Through these strategies, we are able to give our professional writing emphasis a credibility and authority within our larger departmental and university contexts; I recommend these strategies to you.

Syllabi and other course materials from classes in our professional writing track are available up here after this session. Thank you.